

## Worcester Sheriff: 'We're Going To Be Very Proactive'; Agencies Prepared For Unsanctioned Event

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### Worcester

OCEAN CITY — The Ocean City Police Department and allied law enforcement agencies all over Worcester County are bracing for an unsanctioned event, rather ominously called “College Takeover Beach Week” next week, which will likely draw several thousand college-aged individuals to the resort area.

The active word in the event’s title is “takeover” and that’s exactly what the same group did in Virginia Beach and Myrtle Beach, for example in recent years. In April 2013, the event in Virginia Beach resulted in crowds estimated at 40,000 to 50,000 college-aged individuals invading the town’s Oceanfront area.

According to reports, the big crowds roamed the streets, disrupted traffic and businesses and generally scared local residents and other visitors to the town. Perhaps more importantly, the event included several significant crimes including three shootings, multiple stabbings and other serious crimes all in the span of about four hours.

The same event is scheduled to arrive in Ocean City next week from June 5-8. It is important to note the event is not sanctioned by the Town of Ocean City, nor did city officials seek out “College Takeover Beach Week.” Nonetheless, the group is coming and the event has been promoted extensively in social network media outlets and on college campus websites and blogs. In short, the OCPD and allied law enforcement agencies, including the Worcester County Sheriff’s Office, know the group is coming and are taking a proactive, all hands on deck approach.

After the 2013 disaster in Virginia Beach, city leaders and the town’s police department took a proactive approach when the event returned in April with decidedly different results. Virginia Beach officials in April attempted to embrace the influx of visitors rather than take a combative stance and urged local businesses to stay open and welcome the group with a strong police presence on hand. The result was a much calmer event with few if any reports of significant crimes.

Local law enforcement agencies here are taking a similar stance for the event next week in Ocean City.

“There is an unsanctioned event, ‘College Takeover Beach Week,’ taking place in town the first weekend in June,” said OCPD spokesperson Lindsay O’Neal last week. “We’ve addressed the event in our Police Commission meetings, been in contact with our business community and have a very proactive strategic plan for enforcement during that weekend.”

Worcester County Sheriff Reggie Mason said this week his agency has been working closely with the OCPD and other law enforcement agencies to ensure a smooth weekend in the resort and beyond, including West Ocean City.

“I want them to come in here and have a great time, but we’re not going to tolerate any of the stuff we saw with this group in Virginia Beach and Myrtle Beach a couple of years ago,” he said. “Myrtle Beach actually had to shut down because of this. If they obey the laws and behave themselves, we won’t have any problems, but we’re going to be very proactive and we’re going to be ready.”

Mason said his agency is preparing to utilize all of its resources next weekend to help ensure the serious incidents in Virginia Beach and Myrtle Beach, for example, are not duplicated here.

“We’re going to have a heavy presence in Ocean City and in West Ocean City,” he said. “We’re going to have officers on horseback and we’re going to bring our four-wheelers in to patrol the beaches. We’re going to have officers patrolling the outlets in West Ocean City and we’re going to be all over the place.”

The sheriff said he is planning to utilize every able body during the event.

“I’ve canceled all leave for all of our people,” he said. “We’re bringing in our volunteers and our school patrol officers and part-timers. Again, we want them to come and have a great time, but we also want our residents and visitors to feel safe and go out shopping and enjoying the restaurants like they always do.”

Mason said he has had extensive meetings with Ocean City Police Chief Ross Buzzuro in the run-up to the event next weekend to ensure everybody is on the same page.

“We’re working closely with our allied law enforcement agencies,” he said. “We have five great chiefs of police in this county and a great State’s Attorney’s Office, and we’re all working together on this to ensure we don’t have the same problems they saw in other communities.”

O’Neal said last week the OCPD and the town of Ocean City are well aware of the event and some of the problems it could present, but vowed to have the manpower and resources on hand to handle it.

“We will also be assisted by allied agencies during the event,” she said. “We want all of our residents and visitors to know that their safety, as always, is our top priority. Rest assured that the OCPD is well prepared for the influx of visitors that we will see that weekend.”

This article was written by DispatchAdmin, Shawn J. Soper.